

# The Disciplinarian (*dge skos/ dge bskos/ chos khrims pa/ zhal ngo*) in Tibetan Monasteries: his Role and his Rules<sup>1</sup>

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*I never saw a master of discipline in the lamaseries wearing a delightful smile. More often they seemed to be the type of tormentors that might step out of a picture of the Eighteen Buddhist Hells.*<sup>2</sup>

**N**ot much seems to have changed since Schram visited the Tibetan plateau in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century: disciplinarians nowadays are still supposed to look menacing and act impressively strict. In an ideal world, however, wrath is only to be displayed and never felt.<sup>3</sup> In fact, when conducting fieldwork in Northern India in 2012, interviewing disciplinarians on the background and use of monastic guidelines (*bca' yig*),<sup>4</sup> the occasional tormenting questions I put to them were regularly met with delightful smiles rather than with menacing looks.

The word “disciplinarian” is one of the possible translations for a number of official positions, most notably *dge skos*, *chos khrims pa* or *zhal ngo*. Being primarily interested in the usage of monastic guidelines, whenever I asked at a monastery whether someone could tell me something about them during my fieldwork I was referred to a person who was either the disciplinarian or had been one in the past.

Generally speaking, the monastic guidelines contain a lot of information on the roles and duties of monk-officials.<sup>5</sup> When reading these texts I found that the disciplinarian was discussed the most often and in most detail. Some of these monastic guidelines even

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<sup>2</sup> Schram 2006 [1954]: 374.

<sup>3</sup> See for example Lempert 2012: 125.

<sup>4</sup> For a more general discussion on the genre of *bca' yig* see Jansen 2016.

<sup>5</sup> See Jansen 2015: 70–106.

solely address the disciplinarian—they are, so to speak, job-descriptions for the *dge skos*. The primary function of a disciplinarian is to keep the discipline in a monastery. How he is appointed, instated, and how he keeps discipline varies greatly. While these days the Tibetan Buddhist monasteries are becoming more homogenous in terms of their internal organisation—when it comes to the role of the disciplinarian, my sources show that there were all sorts of disciplinarians in the past, and that the apparent uniformity in monasteries these days is not necessarily a continuation of the past.<sup>6</sup> This article then is an investigation of the disciplinarian's institution, largely viewed from monastic guidelines written before the 1950s for monasteries of all sorts of different schools, but it also attempts to contrast the earlier period with information on current day affairs. Before turning to the role of disciplinarian itself, I will first discuss the terminology used.

### 1. Terminology

The word *dge skos*<sup>7</sup> occurs in the *Kṣudrakavastu* of the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya*, the *Vinayasūtra*, and the *Mahāvīyutpatti* as a translation for the Sanskrit *upadhivārika*.<sup>8</sup> The Tibetan term, which is not a literal translation from the Sanskrit, may be short for *dge bar skos pa*; he who establishes [others] in virtue, or he who is established in virtue. In the Indic context, the term is translated as “supervisor” or “provost” of the monastery. He is in charge of the material possessions of the Sangha and in the *Kṣudrakavastu* one of his tasks is described as having to beat the dust out of cloth seats.<sup>9</sup> In Tibetan-ruled Dunhuang, the *dge skos* appears to have been in charge of loaning out grains from the temple granary against interest.<sup>10</sup> The connection of the *dge skos* to the maintenance of the monastery's discipline appears exclusively in later Tibetan sources. Generally speaking, he is a supervisor of the standards of discipline but he is not seen to have a

<sup>6</sup> The—occasionally politically divisive—homogenisation process of the organisation of Tibetan monasteries in- and outside Tibetan areas in more recent times, while being a development that has not gone unnoticed by academics and Tibetans themselves, is a topic that is in need of further research.

<sup>7</sup> The spelling *dge bskos* also occurs regularly. For the sole reason of consistency I refer to *dge skos*.

<sup>8</sup> Silk 2008: 103–4; Schopen 1996: 117; and Schopen 2004: 68–9; 103–4.

<sup>9</sup> The role of the *upadhivārika* varied in the different narratives in the *Mūlasarvāstivāda vinaya* from having a rather elevated status to being not much more than a janitor. See Schopen 1996: 97, n. 35.

<sup>10</sup> Takeuchi 1993: 56–7. The source used is Pt 1119. In Pt 1297, the disciplinarian (*dge skos*) of Weng shí'u temple (*weng shí'u si'i* (si = 寺)) also loans out grains (*gro nas*).

consultative role,<sup>11</sup> solving problems according to Vinaya scripture.<sup>12</sup> Rather, his role is executive and he is to punish those who are in breach of the rules. His judiciary arm was said to even stretch beyond the monks in the monastery itself. A contemporary Tibetan work that deals with the history of monasticism in Tibet and particularly with dGa' ldan monastery explains it as follows:

The disciplinarian has the authority to take charge of things related to the discipline of the general monk populace. Previously, he could also take charge of the judiciary issues of the lay-people and monks [who lived at] the monastic estate.<sup>13</sup>

While the word *dge skos* has older Indic precedents, the earliest extant monastic guidelines do not mention the term. One of the oldest extant sets of monastic guidelines, written for 'Bri gung mthil in the first part of the 13<sup>th</sup> century, describes how that discipline was kept by an uncertain number of *ban gnyer ba* and by twenty *dpon las*, who had executive power. According to this text, reportedly authored by sPyan snga grags pa 'byung gnas (1175–1255),<sup>14</sup> discipline in 'Bri gung mthil in the early 13<sup>th</sup> century was kept in the following way:

In order for the new monks to listen to the honourable *slob dpon*<sup>15</sup> who holds the vinaya (*'dul ba 'dzin pa*, S. *vinayadhara*), you, supervising monks (*ban gnyer ba rnam kyis*) must encourage them. Not being familiar with the trainings and the precepts (*bslab bsrung*) will cause annoyance to all.<sup>16</sup>

In this monastery the executive power lay with the aforementioned twenty *dpon las*, as is evidenced by the following segment:

<sup>11</sup> Gyatso 2003: 230.

<sup>12</sup> The *dge skos* should therefore not be confused or equated with the term *vinayadhara*, someone who has memorised and has extensive knowledge of the Vinaya.

<sup>13</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde* 2005: 86: *dge bskos kyis grwa ba spyi'i sgrig khrims thad the gtogs bya ba'i dbang cha yod/ sngar yin na des dgon pa'i mchod gzhis skya ser gyi gyod don la'ang the gtogs byas chog*

<sup>14</sup> He was the fourth abbot of 'Bri gung mthil, for which this *bca' yig* was composed. The author held that post from 1235 to 1255, suggesting that this text is likely to have been composed within this timeframe.

<sup>15</sup> The text reads *slob dpon lha*. This unusual address "*lha*" is here taken as an expression of respect, possibly interchangeable with *bla*.

<sup>16</sup> 'Bri gung mthil *bca' yig*: 248b: *slob dpon lha 'dul ba 'dzin pa la ban gsar rnam 'dul ba nyan pa la khyed ban gnyer ba rnam kyis bskul/ bslab bsrung ngo ma shes pas thams cad sun 'don par 'dug*

Items of clothes worn by monks (*ban dhe*) that are not in accord with the Dharma, such as *ral gu*,<sup>17</sup> black boots, a type of woollen blanket,<sup>18</sup> all kinds of hats (*zhwa cho ru mo ru*), need to be taken off by the twenty [*dpon las*]. From then on they are not to be worn.<sup>19</sup>

The apparent absence in the earliest *bca' yig* texts of the usage of the word *dge skos* to denote someone with an official position is remarkable. It is my estimate that the term only starts to get used in a Tibetan context from the 15<sup>th</sup> century onwards.<sup>20</sup> The transformation of the word *dge skos* in Vinaya literature denoting a monk in charge of the material surroundings of the monastery to a relatively late adoption of the word that then has come to refer to a position that involves implementing discipline is a curious one and is in need of further research.

## 2. Selection Requirements: Education, Status, or Character

Some of the available sources state that the disciplinarian required a certain level of education, whereas others stipulate a preference for non-intellectuals. Nornang, for example, notes that in his monastery before the 1950s the *dge skos* were appointed from among the *sgrogs med* monks, i.e. monks who did not study logic.<sup>21</sup> The colleges of 'Bras spungs monastery found middle ground by choosing their disciplinarians during the summer period from among the scholars and those who would serve in the winter from among "the lay brethren."<sup>22</sup> Per college two disciplinarians thus served terms of six months at a time.<sup>23</sup> This half-year term was the same for sMin sgröl

<sup>17</sup> This word is derived from the Sanskrit *rallaka*, a blanket or cloth made from wool, possibly from the *rallaka* deer, comparable to Pashmina, Monier-Williams, *A Sanskrit English Dictionary*: 868.

<sup>18</sup> Another version of this text ('*Bri gung mthil bca' yig* a: 168a) reads *glag pa* for *glog pa*, this may be an alternative spelling for *klag*, which is an archaic word for a thick cape woven from wool, *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*: 40: (*rnying*) *bal gyis btags pa'i snam bu'i lwa ba*.

<sup>19</sup> '*Bri gung mthil bca' yig*: 250a: *ban dhés ral gu gon pa dang/ lham nag dang/ glog pa dang/ zhwa cho ru mo ru la sogs pa chos dang mi mthun pa'i gos rnam nyi shu bos shus/ phyin chad ma gon/*

<sup>20</sup> The earliest reference to the word *dge skos* in monastic guidelines I have come across so far is in Tsong kha pa's *bca' yig* for Byams pa gling, probably written in 1417. *Byams pa gling na bzhu gs pa'i spyi'i dge 'dun la khrims su bca' ba'i yi ge*: 249a.

<sup>21</sup> Nornang 1990: 251.

<sup>22</sup> By this I assume the author means the non-scholar monks, without *dge slong* ordination.

<sup>23</sup> Snellgrove and Richardson 1986 [1968]: 241.

gling monastery in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>24</sup> Its *bca' yig* gives the job-description for the office of disciplinarian as follows:

The disciplinarian—who, in possession of the approval of the general constituency, has good intentions for the general welfare, is involved with the monastery committee (*spyi so*) and is very strict on discipline—is appointed for six months. He sets forth the general discipline, in all its facets, with effort, without regard for shiny white faces (*ngo skya snum*).<sup>25</sup>

The disciplinarian was clearly in charge of the day-to-day upkeep of discipline: his permission had to be received before leaving the monastery grounds, he would make sure all dress appropriately and he was responsible for the comportment of the monks, during assembly, but also outside of it.<sup>26</sup> He would confiscate improper attire or forbidden objects, such as weapons, but also divided the shares of donations (*'gyed*) to the Sangha among the resident monks.<sup>27</sup> He furthermore was responsible for keeping the register (*tho len po*) of the total monk-population (*grwa dmangs*).<sup>28</sup> In 'Bras spungs monastery during the late 17<sup>th</sup> century, the disciplinarian was also charged with handing out degrees. According to the Fifth Dalai Lama the *dge skos* did not always remain an impartial judge:

It is well known that when taking the *gling bsre* [exam],<sup>29</sup> one would be let off the hook without having one's level of education examined,

<sup>24</sup> This six-month term is also in place in rGyud stod monastery in India, while I was informed that in Tibet the disciplinarian's position used to change four times a year. Personal communication with Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, Dharamsala, August 2012. The maximum term appears to be three years, which is in place in 'Bri gung byang chub gling in India. Personal communication with the director of 'Bri gung byang chub gling, Rajpur, August 2012.

<sup>25</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 309: *dge bskos spyi'i 'os 'thu'i steng nas spyi bsam bzang zhiing blo spyi sor gnas pa khirms non che ba re zla ba drug re bsko ba dang/ ngo skya snum la ma bltos pa'i spyi khirms yo srong 'bad rtsol gyis thon pa byed/* The unusual phrase *ngo skya snum* is here understood to indicate a certain bias, perhaps based on mere external qualities (a face that is white and shiny). The call to impartiality is also found in *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 87, where the word *snyoms gdal* is used, which can be translated as 'a fair approach'.

<sup>26</sup> This is summed up in a contemporary Tibetan book on the history of mTshur phu, which also contains a reconstruction of a *bca' yig* that is presumed lost; see *mTshur phu dgon gyi dkar chag* 1995: 280.

<sup>27</sup> *sMin sgrol gling bca' yig*: 238. What the disciplinarian is meant to do with the forbidden objects is not specified.

<sup>28</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde* 2005: 87.

<sup>29</sup> This is one of the lower level *dge bshes* degrees at 'Bras spungs, see Tarab Tulku 2000: 17–19.

had the disciplinarian received a present (*rngan pa*).<sup>30</sup>

The author of the *bca' yig* for bKra shis lhun po monastery, the Eighth Panchen Lama bsTan pa'i dbang phyug (1855–1882), considers his ideal candidate to be who is not just well educated, but also affluent, with a reliable background (*rgyun drang*),<sup>31</sup> and a sturdy appearance.<sup>32</sup> This 1876 text states that suitable candidates should not try to get off the shortlist and that those not on the list should not try to get on it. The monk selected for the job is given a seal or contract (*tham ga*), which lists his responsibilities, and from that moment on he cannot go back on his word.<sup>33</sup> While describing the procedure, the text then warns that no one should try to order around those who exercise the general law (*spyi khyab kyi khrims*), such as the disciplinarian, or those have done so in the past.<sup>34</sup>

The above selection procedure for bKra shis lhun po was for the position of “great disciplinarian” (*dge skos chen mo*). It is clear, however, that procedures varied greatly and unfortunately not all *bca' yig* contain their descriptions. The following accounts on the selection process are based on the contemporary situation in exile.

At rNam rgyal grwa tshang in India, the disciplinarian is picked from the senior monks. He is appointed for two years. Thub bstan yar 'phel, who was the general secretary (*drung spyi*) at the monastery in 2012, mentioned that at other monasteries, like at mTshan nyid grwa tshang (Institute of Buddhist Dialectics), a new disciplinarian is chosen every six months on the basis of votes. When the change is made there is a specific ceremony in which he gets handed his special

<sup>30</sup> 'Bras spungs *bca' yig*: 308: *gling bsre gtod* [sic?: *gtong*] *skabs dge skos kyi rngan pa blangs nas yon tan che chung la mi blta bar gtong ba yongs su bsrags shing* /

<sup>31</sup> I take this to refer to his ordination lineage. It might, however, also refer to one's family background. Here no mention is made whether having *dge slong* ordination was a prerequisite. The elderly monk Shes rab rgya mtsho of Sa skya monastery noted that one did not have to have *dge slong* vows to be a disciplinarian there. Personal communication, Rajpur, August 2012.

<sup>32</sup> This physical quality is also mentioned by an anonymous monk-officer in 'Brug pa dkar [sic] rgyud monastery in Clement Town, Dehradun. He said that while the chant-master needs to be well educated (*slob sbyong yag po*) the disciplinarian has to be *gzugs po stobs chen po*: big and strong.

<sup>33</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 86: [...] *dge skos las 'khur 'dzin dgos kyi tham ga byung phral dang len byed pa las/ tham ga phyir 'bul dang don bud sogs dgyis mi chog cing* [...] / In contemporary rNam rgyal grwa tshang, the new disciplinarian (*dge skos*), during his appointment ceremony, recites a prayer (*smon lam*), the wording of which is not set. In this prayer he promises to follow the Vinaya and to serve the monastery. Personal communication Ngag dbang dpal sbyin, Dharamsala, July 2012.

<sup>34</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 86: *dge skos 'di bzhin spyi khyab kyi khrims gnou du song gshis byed dang byas zin kyi rigs la mtho dma' sus kyang g.yog skul bgyis mi chog cing* [...] /

hat and stick. The out-going *dge bskos* then hands over the monastic guidelines and the new disciplinarian reads out the *bca' yig* to the assembly of monks (*tshogs*).<sup>35</sup>

In gNas chung monastery in India, the monastery's committee (*lhan rgyas*), which consists of eight people, chooses three candidates (*'os mi*). Monks who have been in the monastery for more than ten years can vote and the person with the most votes is elected as the *dge skos*. The position is rotated every two years. The change takes place during *dGa' ldan lnga mchod*.<sup>36</sup> The new disciplinarian performs a Yamantaka self-initiation. Subsequently, all monks are called to the assembly to witness the ceremony. A prayer to Mañjuśrī is recited, the hat gets handed over, and the new disciplinarian makes three prostrations. Rice and flowers are scattered. The new master of discipline then recites a short prayer (*smon lam*), the contents of which is at his own discretion, although it needs to contain the promise that during his term he will follow the Vinaya and serve the monastery to the best of his abilities. The congregation of monks is then given tea and rice; the disciplinarian is served first. After this short break, he reads out the short biography of Tsong kha pa, which completes the ceremony. During the evening session the new disciplinarian reads out the monastery's rules,<sup>37</sup> slowly and clearly, so that everyone can hear.<sup>38</sup>

According to Gutschow, at the *dGe lugs* Karsha monastery in Zangskar a new disciplinarian is appointed on a yearly basis and the ceremony also takes place during *dGa' ldan lnga mchod*. The new disciplinarian arrives at the monastery riding a horse, and is welcomed "like a new bride," i.e. he is presented with ceremonial scarves (*kha btags*) and receives a variety of gifts. He then reads out the *bca' yig* to the congregation.<sup>39</sup>

In rGyud stod monastery in India, the appointment of disciplinarian rotates every six months. According to Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, it would change every three months in old Tibet: once per season. Contrasting to the tradition at the previous monasteries, the ceremony is not on a specific day. The date is decided by the newly appointed disciplinarian. The actual instatement is planned on

<sup>35</sup> Personal communication with Thub bstan yar 'phel, McLeodganj, July 2012.

<sup>36</sup> This is the twenty-fifth day of the tenth month: the day on which the death of Tsong kha pa is commemorated.

<sup>37</sup> In gNas chung these rules are called the *nang khrims*, not *bca' yig*. On the possible difference between these two see Jansen 2015: 30–32.

<sup>38</sup> Personal communication with Ngag dbang dpal sbyin, Dharamsala, August, 2012.

<sup>39</sup> Gutschow 2004: 63. The *bca' yig* in question is reportedly written by the 15<sup>th</sup> century *dGe lugs* master Shes rab bzang po and his disciple Slob dpon mdo sde rin chen.

a good or auspicious day (*dus bzang*). When everyone is already seated, the new disciplinarian comes into the assembly hall (*tshogs khang*) with his shoes still on: he is the only one allowed to wear them inside. He is shown to his new place in the seating arrangement (*gral*) and his new place in the debate ground. He then gets handed a drum (*brkang rnga*) and beats it three times, just for the sake of ceremony. At that moment, he gets to wear his hat on his one shoulder and the disciplinarian's staff. He then commits to being the disciplinarian. The outgoing disciplinarian gets off his throne (*khri*) and the monastic seats (*sding ba*) are changed. A swastika (*g.yung drung*) is then drawn on the seat of the new disciplinarian.<sup>40</sup>

In the case of dGa' ldan monastery in Tibet, the office of disciplinarian is nowadays elected by the general office (*bla spyi*) alone. Previously, however, the Tibetan government had the authority to appoint monks to this post.<sup>41</sup> This may be read as an indication that the maintenance of discipline in a monastery so close to the government was seen as important enough to get involved.

### 3. On the Term *Zhal ngo*

Aside from *chos khirms pa* and *dge skos*, another term to denote a monk charged with maintaining the discipline is *zhal ngo*. The above described position of *dge skos chen mo* in bKra shis lhun po is similar to that of *zhal ngo* in old Tibet's 'Bras spungs, Se ra and dGa' ldan. This is a disciplinarian who oversees the great assembly (*tshogs chen*) and has a position of considerable power. The word *zhal ngo*, literally meaning simply "presence," is also used in the secular world. Aside from referring to "someone who does the Sangha's work" the term is also simply explained to mean "manager" (*do dam pa*).<sup>42</sup> In Bhutan, *zhal ngos* are the "hereditary chiefs," i.e. the leaders of the clans.<sup>43</sup> The sense of an exalted social status in the secular world is also attested in *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig* where it is mentioned that the *chos mdzad* ('monk-sponsors')<sup>44</sup> come from a lineage of *zhal ngo*.<sup>45</sup> In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, the word referred to a low ranking military officer,<sup>46</sup> which

<sup>40</sup> Personal communication with Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, Dharamsala, August, 2012.

<sup>41</sup> *Bod kyi dgon sde* 1995: 86: *de ni bla spyis 'dem bsko byed kyin yod/ sngar bod sa gnas srid gzhang gis 'dem bskor the gtogs byed kyin yod pa dang/*

<sup>42</sup> *brDa dkrol gser gyi me long*: 765: 1) *do dam pa'i ming* 2) *dge 'dun gyi las byed mkhan gyi ming*

<sup>43</sup> Aris 1976: 690.

<sup>44</sup> For more on *chos mdzad* see Jansen 2015: 74–78.

<sup>45</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 71: *zhal ngo'i brgyud las gson nges pa'i chos mdzad de/*

<sup>46</sup> Travers 2008: 14.



the *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo* specifies as a military commander over a group of twenty-five people.<sup>47</sup> Although there is no clear evidence for this, I find it unlikely that the monastic institution borrowed this term from the "secular world" or vice versa. The term in all cases seems to imply a certain natural authority that the *zhal ngo* possessed.

#### 4. *The Disciplinarian and the bCa' yig*

One monk I interviewed explains the disciplinarian to be the monastery's *khrims bdag*, the "owner of the rules," and to him it makes sense that he would be the one appointed to take care of the monastic guidelines.<sup>48</sup> This often means quite literally that the disciplinarian keeps the monastery's copy of the *bca' yig*. In Spituk in Ladakh, for example, the monastic guidelines are kept in a box to which only the *dge skos* has the key. Taking care of the monastic guidelines also included carrying the text to certain ceremonies. During the Great Prayer Festival (*smon lam chen mo*) in Lhasa, 'Bras spungs' *Tshogs chen zhal ngo* would carry the monastic guidelines of said monastery on his shoulder during the procession.<sup>49</sup>

When the monastic guidelines were read out, which was a regular occurrence—although not in all monasteries—it would be the disciplinarian's task to do so. In Kirti monastery in Tibet the *bca' yig* is still read out every year by the overarching disciplinarian (*zhal ngo*). The scholar monk Re mdo sengge from Kirti describes it as a nice occasion: someone holds out the scroll and it is slowly unrolled as the *zhal ngo* reads. The reading out of it does not sound like ordinary prayers (*kha 'don*) or reciting other texts, since there is a specific "melody" (*dbyangs*) to it. In general, Kirti monastery has eight doctrinal sessions (*chos thog*), two per season of the year. The *bca' yig* is read during one of those sessions but Re mdo sengge does not remember which one. At that time all the monks would come together. The *zhal ngo* then would read out the *bca' yig* and explain the commentary (*'grel pa*) accompanying the *bca' yig*. If he is well-educated then he would also add his own citations (*lung drangs pa*), which are usually from the Vinaya.<sup>50</sup>

In 19<sup>th</sup> century bKra shis lhun po, where the disciplinarians for the individual colleges were called *chos khrims pa*, they exercised their

<sup>47</sup> *Bod rgya tshig mdzod chen mo*: 2379.

<sup>48</sup> Personal communication with Thub bstan yar 'phel, McLeodganj, July 2012.

<sup>49</sup> For more on this ceremony and the role of the *bca' yig* therein, see Jansen 2013a: 114–115.

<sup>50</sup> Personal communication with Re mdo sengge, Dharamsala, July 2012.

own set of rules with the help of their own guidelines:

The *chos khrims pa* is one who, without hypocrisy, enforces the rules with regard to the duties allotted to each tantric functionary. By praising the good and putting an end to the bad and by taking the contents of tantric college's own *bca' yig* as a base, he enforces the rules and guards their upholding (*rgyun skyong*).<sup>51</sup>

A large monastery could thus house a sizeable number of disciplinarians. In smaller monasteries, there was often just one disciplinarian, who was either called *dge skos* or *chos khrims pa*.<sup>52</sup>

In many cases, disciplinarians were also involved in composing the *bca' yig*. While oftentimes important religious masters authored these texts, they regularly did so consulting the disciplinarians of the monastery in question. In exile monasteries, the steering committee regularly writes new *bca' yig* together. In some cases the disciplinarian would write new monastic guidelines by himself. A monk who acted as the disciplinarian at Se ra byes in India, wrote a set of guidelines for his monastic college (*grwa tshang*), but "when the rules were completed, many [monks] did not like them and for two nights, stones were pelted at my house, which is why those shutters had to be made. They did that twice in the night within a gap of about seven days."<sup>53</sup>

### 5. The Disciplinarian's Executive Role

While the role of the disciplinarian was seen by some monks as a burden or a distraction, within the *dGe lugs* school in particular it was an important stepping-stone. For the selection of the position of *dGa' ldan khri pa* (the head of the *dGe lugs* school), one had to have served as—among other things—a *dge skos* at either rGyud stod or rGyud smad.<sup>54</sup> It can be surmised from the above that the disciplinarian, as the enforcer of both unspoken rules as well as the *bca' yig*, generally

<sup>51</sup> *bKra shis lhun po bca' yig*: 84: *sngags pa'i las tsham rnams nas kyang so so'i bgo skal gyi bya ba chos khrims pa nas khrims gnon ngo lkog med nges/ bzang po la gzengs bstod dang/ ngan pa tshar gcod pa sogs 'di dang rgyud grwa rang gi bca' yig dgongs don gzhir bzhag gi khrims gnon rgyun skyong dang/*

<sup>52</sup> I have not been able to explain the use of the two terms on the basis of school or regional preference. It appears that monasteries in Ladakh prefer *chos khrims pa*.

<sup>53</sup> Interview with Ngawang Choseng (no. 91), Tibetan Oral History Project, 2007: 38. This source unfortunately only gives the English translation, while the interview was conducted in Tibetan.

<sup>54</sup> I was told that in rGyud stod monastery the *bla ma dbu mdzad* could become the abbot and only retired abbots could become *dGa' ldan khri pa*. Personal communication with Ngag dbang sangs rgyas, Dharamsala, August 2012.

speaking was not required to have an in-depth knowledge of Vinaya literature, whereas a thorough understanding of the local monastic rules was pivotal. He had high levels of responsibility and power and was therefore corruptible. This is perhaps one reason that nowadays the Bon Bya ti lo monastery in Li thang (Khams) only replaces its disciplinarian yearly and leaves all the other administrative monks in place.<sup>55</sup> While the disciplinarians did not stand alone in maintaining discipline in the monastery, the day-to-day activities depended greatly on the moral standing of these monks.

It was not just their moral standing as disciplinarians that was important; they also needed to be decisive and they could not let bad behaviour go unpunished. The *'Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*, written in 1802, states for example that in the case of someone breaking the rules "the two disciplinarians (*chos khrims pa*) should not turn a blind eye (*btang snyoms su ma bzhag par*), but should give a fitting punishment (*bkod 'doms*)."<sup>56</sup> Both favouring certain individuals and being lax in enforcing the rules were apparently not uncommon among monks in official posts. So much so that some *bca' yig* even stipulate punishments for those officials that let monks go scot-free or display a bias toward a certain group. For example, The *'Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig* notes that when the committing of a *parājika* offence would go unpunished, those in charge of punishing, such as the *spyi gnyer* (general caretaker), would need to prostrate themselves five hundred times, while—when the disciplinarian and the chant-master (*dbu chos*) were guilty of letting misbehaving monks go unpunished—they would have to do a thousand prostrations each.<sup>57</sup>

It is a general feature of the *bca' yig*, that the implementation of rules is often portrayed as being crucial to the (social) order, thereby adding to the importance of the position of disciplinarian. This sentiment is found in the set of monastic guidelines for Se ra monastery from 1820:

For the teachers and the disciplinarians and the like not to implement the rules is to undo the Teachings from their base. Therefore, from now on, to show biased and to not uphold the rules, be they great or small, without concern for the consequences, which is irresponsible,

<sup>55</sup> Karmay and Nagano 2003: 508.

<sup>56</sup> *'Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*: 403: *chos khrims pa gnyis nas btang snyoms su ma bzhag par 'os 'tshams kyi bkod 'doms byed dgos shing/*

<sup>57</sup> *'Bri gung byang chub gling bca' yig*: 404, 5: *lhag par chos khrims gnyis dang/ do dam thun mong nas pham pa bzhi bcas 'gal ba byung rigs rna thos tsam byung 'phral rtsad gcod thog gong gi chad las sogs khrims kyi bya ba la nan tan byed dgos/ de la spyi gnyer sogs kyiis 'gal na phyag lnga rgya re/ dbu chos kyiis 'gal na stong phyag 'bul dgos/*

should be vigorously and continuously suppressed.<sup>58</sup>

For internal monastic matters, the obvious candidate for mediation would be the disciplinarian. The guidelines for dPal yul dar thang, written in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, indicate that this person was not handed an easy task:

From now on, the disciplinarian should not, when quarrels and suchlike occur, oversee major or minor disputes—whether internal or external, general or specific, large or small—that are not relevant. Surely, one needs to continue to treat all the external and internal rules of the Teachings (*bstan pa'i bca' khrims*) with priority. Therefore, no one should encourage him to act as go-between for others, whether they be high or low, in disputes (*gyod 'khon par*).<sup>59</sup>

From the above can be gleaned that the disciplinarian was asked to adjudicate various, perhaps personal, disputes and that that was, strictly speaking, not part of his job description. The involvement of the disciplinarian could easily lead to him losing the impartial stand many *bca' yig* implore him to take, making mediation of smaller disputes not officially part of the function of disciplinarian.

In this *rNying ma* monastery, which was situated in mGo log, Amdo, the abbot was also held responsible for the upkeep of discipline along with the disciplinarian.<sup>60</sup> A clear distinction is made between the abbot and the disciplinarian, however. The abbot has a supervisory function (*klad gzigs*), whereas that of the disciplinarian is executive (*do khur*).<sup>61</sup>

## 6. Concluding Remarks

In summary, the role of the disciplinarian was, and still is, significant. According to the *bca' yig* that I have studied, his tasks were significant, a few of which have been highlighted in this article.

<sup>58</sup> *Se ra theg chen gling rtsa tshig*: 183: *bla ma dge skos sogs nas sgrig lam ma mnan na bstan pa 'go nas bshigs pa yin pas da nas bzung phyogs lhuings dang/ rgyu la ma bltas par sgrig lam che phra tshang mar 'khur med ma byas par tsha nan rgyun chags su dgos rgyu yin/*

<sup>59</sup> *dPal yul dar thang bca' yig*: 198, 9: *deng phan dge bskos nas grwa tshang nang 'khon pa lta bu byung na dang/ spyi khag che chung rnams kyi don ma yin pa'i phyi nang gyi gyod che phra gang la yang gzigs mi dgos/ bstan pa'i bca' khrims phyi nang thams cad la nan tan gzigs pa mtha' 'khyongs nges dgos pas gzhan mtho dman sus kyang gyod 'khon bar bzhugs bcol mi chog.*

<sup>60</sup> *dPal yul dar thang bca' yig*: 199: *sgrigs yig 'di'i nang 'khod tshad mkhan po dang dge bskos gnyis kyi khur thang yin la/*

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*: *de dag gi klad gzigs mkhan po dang do khur dge bskos nas mdzad dgos pas/*

Among others, the disciplinarian was to: take charge of the discipline in and outside the monastery; keep the monastic guidelines; read them out in the assembly; mete out punishments for misbehaving monks (and sometimes lay-people); fill a post on the general board (*spyi so, lhan rgyas* etc.);<sup>62</sup> examine and enroll new monks;<sup>63</sup> keep the monk-population records; oversee the seating arrangements; adjudicate during conflicts; give monks permission to leave or conduct business, and to deal with (potential) sponsors (*sbyin bdag*).<sup>64</sup>

Naturally, being a disciplinarian also had certain perks, indicated in both the texts and by the monk officials I have consulted. A fair number of *bca' yig* refer to the corruptibility of the *dge skos*, which means that in that position one could acquire "presents" from certain people. Aside from that obvious perquisite, according to the monastic guidelines, a disciplinarian sometimes was to live in different (presumably better) housing. In other instances he was allowed to keep a horse and in most cases he would receive a larger share of the offerings. The disciplinarian monks I interviewed were less outspoken regarding the benefits of filling this role, which may have to do with that monks nowadays are more study oriented and it is therefore seen as an interruption of the monastic education. Some monks did point out that one gains in perceived status (*mthong*) among the monks, one is able to make important decisions for the monastery, and—perhaps not unimportantly—one is allowed to keep one's shoes on in the assembly.

Even though more fieldwork as well as more textual study remains to be done, on the whole, it appears that the differences between the tasks of the *dge skos* in the various monasteries are less big in contemporary times—the disciplinarian's duties appear more uniform compared to the past. Furthermore, disciplinarians nowadays seem to have less power and are thus less corruptible, which has to do with the change in economic position of the monasteries in Tibetan society. Lastly, it is my direct experience that they are not as menacing as Schram once described them to be.

I initially set out to get to grips with the genre of *bca' yig*, but in the process I have found that to understand the monastic guidelines—and particularly the way they were used—one needs to understand the disciplinarian. The reverse is also true: to understand the disciplinarian is to understand the monastic guidelines.

<sup>62</sup> On the managerial committees in monasteries see Jansen 2015: 105–106.

<sup>63</sup> For more on the enrollment process, see Jansen 2013b.

<sup>64</sup> In dPal yul dar thang, for example, the disciplinarian—together with the main manager (*spyi pa*)—was to give the donors an estimate of the cost of the requested ritual, he then had to keep a record of it and had to divide some of the proceedings (*dung yon*) among the reciting monks. *Ibid.*: 194.

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